



Republican Policy Committee

Larry E. Craig, Chairman Jade West, Staff Director 347 Russell Senate Office Building (202)224-2946 <http://www.senate.gov/~rpc/>
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Crisis in Iraq Worsens

Another Clinton Foreign Policy Failure

On August 31, 1996, 40,000 Iraqi troops equipped with tanks and hundreds of artillery pieces seized the northern Kurdish city of Irbil. (See map, page 6.) Two days later, the United States launched 27 cruise missiles against Iraqi air defense and communication sites. This was followed by a "mop-up" operation of an additional 17 cruise missiles and an extension of the "no-fly" zone in southern Iraq from thirty-two to thirty-three degrees north.

President Clinton has claimed that these missile strikes were a success. But the Administration's rhetoric is contradicted by reality. The situation in Iraq has worsened since the U.S. counterstrikes. Kurdish forces supported by Saddam Hussein have captured the last key stronghold from a rival Kurdish faction, expanding Iraq's power over the whole Kurdish region. A major CIA-funded effort to destabilize Saddam virtually has been wiped out. The international coalition that won a remarkable victory in the Persian Gulf War is fractured, and the humanitarian relief program established in 1991 is in shambles.

In response to this series of defeats for U.S. policy, President Clinton has ordered F-117 stealth bombers to Kuwait and has moved B-52 bombers closer to the Persian Gulf region. But the President has failed to explain to the American people what goals U.S. military action will achieve or why the U.S. should be putting American troops at risk. And President Clinton has failed to state what actions the Iraqi leader must take for the United States to halt its military countermeasures. Moreover, the President has failed to consult with Congress about any of these matters.

The Kurds, the Iraqi Opposition, and the International Relief Operation

In the wake of the Gulf War in early 1991, and the unsuccessful Kurdish rebellion against Saddam Hussein's regime in the spring of that year, the United States established a substantial political and humanitarian presence in northern Iraq. The primary beneficiaries were two major Kurdish organizations — the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) — and two major anti-Saddam political groups — the Iraqi National Congress (INC) and, to a lesser extent, the Iraqi National Accord (INA). Pursuant to U.N. Security Council Resolution 688 of April 1, 1991, a multinational relief effort based in Turkey ("Operation Provide Comfort") was established to provide protection and humanitarian support to the Kurds and others taking refuge from Saddam in northern Iraq. However, with the seeming triumph of pro-Saddam Kurdish forces, accompanied by the decimation of the opposition groups

by Iraqi security services, American influence in the region has been almost completely uprooted, and continuation of the humanitarian aid program is in doubt.

The Kurds: As the world's largest nationality without its own state (about 25 million people), the Kurds have for decades waged intermittent guerrilla warfare against the governments of the countries in which they reside: Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, with smaller enclaves in Syria and in the former Soviet republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan. There has long been serious factional strife between the two major Kurdish organizations operating in northern Iraq, which, as noted above, are the KDP and the PUK. (There is also a third major Kurdish organization with forces in northern Iraq, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), headquartered in Syria and directing its actions primarily against Turkey. For a description of the factions, see page 6.)

In May 1992, under U.S. tutelage, the leaders of the KDP and the PUK (respectively, Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani) agreed to share power in an administration independent of Baghdad. However, subsequent factional fighting erupted due to distrust between the two organizations, fueled by disagreements over which group had the right to levy "taxes" on petroleum and other supplies crossing Iraq's border with Turkey in violation of U.N. economic sanctions. Each evidently mistrusting its fellow-Kurdish rival more than its historic enemies, the KDP allied itself with Saddam Hussein and the PUK with Iran. An Iranian incursion into northern Iraq in July 1996, in cooperation with the PUK, prompted the intervention by Iraqi forces the following month. As of September 9, with the fall of Sulaymaniyah to the KDP, virtually all of northern Iraq is controlled by pro-Saddam forces. (The third Kurdish faction, the PKK, apparently has not participated in any major way in the KDP/PUK fighting but has taken advantage of the preoccupation of the other two groups with each other to strengthen its hold on areas close to the Turkish border. Turkey, which has staged repeated raids into northern Iraq against PKK targets, has announced its intention to create a security zone extending several miles into Iraq to check PKK infiltration into Turkey.)

The Iraqi Opposition: If Saddam's intervention in northern Iraq has been decisive in Kurdish factional fighting, it has been catastrophic for one of the two anti-Saddam resistance organizations operating there with American support, the INC, and damaging for the other, the INA. Both organizations are umbrella organizations seeking to unite anti-Saddam forces in Iraq, including not only Kurds (the KDP and the PUK were both essential components of the INC), but Shiite Muslims from southern Iraq (the so-called "Marsh Arabs," whom Saddam has been systematically uprooting from their home region), various Islamic organizations, Turkmens (i.e., ethnic Turks living in northern Iraq, mostly affiliated with the INA), and dissidents from among the Sunni Muslim Arabs that predominate in central Iraq, even including former members of Saddam's ruling Baath Party. The INA is based in Jordan, and the INC is based in the northern Iraqi city of Salahuddin and had, until September 1, a substantial presence in the northern Iraqi city of Irbil, when it was captured by pro-Saddam forces. Details are not fully known but the INC in particular appears to have sustained heavy losses; the INA, with most of its members in neighboring countries, was not hurt as badly. According to press reports, hundreds of members of the INC, plus some INA members, were seized and summarily executed by Iraqi security operatives on the heels of the KDP capture of Irbil. Hundreds of others were taken into Iraqi custody and are presumed to have been killed. "In Iraq, if you are arrested, you are dead," said one INC supporter [*Washington Post*, 9/9/96]. The INC headquarters in Irbil was

looted by Iraqi agents (including the seizure of documents and computers, which could aid in the identification and location of members) before being blown up.

The International Relief Operation: In April 1991, under the authorization of Security Council Resolution 688, the United States, in cooperation with Gulf War allied countries, initiated "Operation Provide Comfort" (OPC) in northern Iraq from bases in Turkey. In addition, a 1991 agreement negotiated between Iraq and the United Nations provided for the presence of up to 600 U.N. relief workers and 500 security guards for the humanitarian effort. That agreement lapsed in June 1992, and the Baghdad government has refused to renew it. Prior to Saddam's August offensive, there were about 200 U.N. staff in northern Iraq and an equal number of personnel from humanitarian relief organizations. The U.S. government contribution to the program since its initiation has totaled over \$750 million, of which some \$570 million was appropriated in 1991. In the aftermath of the KDP's apparent triumph, the State Department has indicated that the humanitarian aspects of OPC will be suspended but that protective overflights in the no-fly zone will continue. But given the KDP's current pro-Saddam orientation and Turkey's increasing concerns about the stability of its Iraqi border, continuation of protective overflights cannot be taken as a certainty. In December 1996, the Turkish government will reexamine its willingness to continue to allow flights to take off from Turkish bases and a January 1997 shutdown of the program seems likely.

In short, in the aftermath of Saddam's intervention in northern Iraq and the Clinton Administration's response, American influence and prestige in northern Iraq have sustained a serious setback, with the major beneficiaries being Iraq and, to a lesser extent, Iran. The effects throughout the Persian Gulf region could be substantial.

The Coalition: From Unity to Division

President George Bush assembled 28 countries into a U.S.-led multinational force that destroyed the Iraqi forces that invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. Bringing together countries traditionally at odds with each other (e.g., the Soviet Union, Western European powers, Syria, Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, among others) was a diplomatic feat. As part of the over 600,000-man force, Syria contributed about 21,000 troops with 270 T-62 tanks, Egypt contributed 37,000 soldiers, and the Soviet Union assisted with two warships. France provided a division of troops which went into Iraq alongside the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division.

Today, amid ineffective diplomacy by Secretary of State Warren Christopher, France has objected vehemently to the U.S. missile response and has refused to participate in patrolling the newly-expanded "no-fly zone" in southern Iraq. Russia has been equally opposed to the U.S. unilateral action. Every Arab state, including those that participated in the 1991 multinational force, has condemned the U.S. raids, while NATO allies Spain, Italy and Turkey have voiced objections. Even Germany and Japan have only given lukewarm support to the operation. The only cooperating allies are Great Britain and Canada. The coalition has deteriorated to the point that the U.S. finds itself acting with little support in this crisis.

The Clinton Administration's inattentiveness and weak response to actions taken by Saddam prior to the current crisis likely emboldened the Iraqi leader. In a White House letter to Senator Thurmond dated September 5, 1996, the Administration described the continuation of Iraq's "gross violations" of a number of international obligations, including:

- Iraq's denying access to U.N. weapons inspectors. On July 16 and 18, 1996, Iraq prohibited UNSCOM (United Nations Special Commission on Iraq) investigators from entering a site suspected of hiding information on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program;
- A continued threat against Iraqi citizens throughout the country by Saddam's regime;
- Iraq's repression of its Shiite population, with policies aimed at destroying the Marsh Arabs' way of life in southern Iraq;
- Continued human rights violations, with Iraq failing to cease repression of its own people; and
- Iraq's continuing to provide refuge for known terrorists and thwarting efforts to account for the hundreds of Kuwaitis and third-country nationals who disappeared during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait.

If the Clinton Administration had been providing strong leadership, the very existence of such violations could have provided the glue to prevent a fracturing of the alliance in this current crisis. Instead, the only response to these "gross violations" came in the form of a United Nations Security Council "formal statement" of August 23, 1996, which stated support of UNSCOM's mission in Iraq and cited Iraq's behavior as a gross violation of international obligations. Only a few months earlier (May 20, 1996), the United States accepted Iraq's signature on a Memorandum of Understanding (pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 986 of April 14, 1995) setting forth the terms for allowing Iraq to sell \$2 billion of oil over six months to purchase food, medicine and other materials and supplies for essential civilian needs.

According to the White House letter, "Saddam Hussein's latest actions in launching a large military action in northern Iraq provide fresh evidence that he is ready at any time to use force aggressively to achieve his ends and is a threat to his own people, to his neighbors, and to the peace of the region." Given the cataloguing of continued Iraqi "gross violations" of international obligations, Saddam's current military actions should come as no surprise to the Administration. In fact, the Administration admitted in the September 5 letter that, "our intelligence disclosed an Iraqi military buildup underway near Irbil several weeks ago." Given such information, two legitimate questions can be asked: (1) What actions, if any, was the Administration taking to shore up the alliance prior to Iraq's August 31 invasion of Irbil?; and (2) Why was Congress not consulted prior to September 3 when the U.S. launched the first cruise missile attack against Iraq?

Congressional Consultation

Except for a "courtesy call" from the Administration to the Majority Leaders of the Senate and House of Representatives, there has been only one communication from the White House to members of Congress. This notification came in letter form **two days after** the first U.S. cruise missile attack. Except for several briefings by low-level officials **informing** some members of the past operation and the status of current events, the Administration has failed to consult with Congress on this crisis, and has failed to address future operations or plans.

Lack of Goals/Mission

Perhaps the Administration cannot address possible future U.S. actions because it has failed to identify the goals or mission of its military policy. In his only formal statement to the American people on September 3, 1996, President Clinton had this to say about the U.S. attack on Iraq:

"Our objectives are limited, but clear: to make Saddam pay a price for the latest act of brutality, reducing his ability to threaten his neighbors and America's interests....We must make it clear that reckless acts have consequences or those acts will increase. We must reduce Iraq's ability to strike out at its neighbors, and we must increase America's ability to contain Iraq over the long run."

If the President is serious about achieving what he believes are U.S. goals, he must act **now** to set his case before the American people and to include their elected representatives in the Congress in his deliberations. Anything less would be a major failure of leadership.

Staff contacts: Dr. Yvonne Bartoli and Jim Jatras, 224-2946

IRAQI FACTIONS

Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP): The largest Kurdish faction in northern Iraq. By controlling roads to Turkey and levying fees on truck traffic, the KDP has made millions of dollars 'taxing' illegal oil exports to Turkey and goods imported into Iraq. Headquartered in the northern Iraqi city of Saladdin. Leader: Massoud Barzani, son of the late Mullah Mustafa Barzani, leader of the 1943. Massoud Barzani recently engineered a strategy of cooperating with Saddam Hussein. Barzani engineered a strategy of cooperating with Saddam.

Jalal Talabani

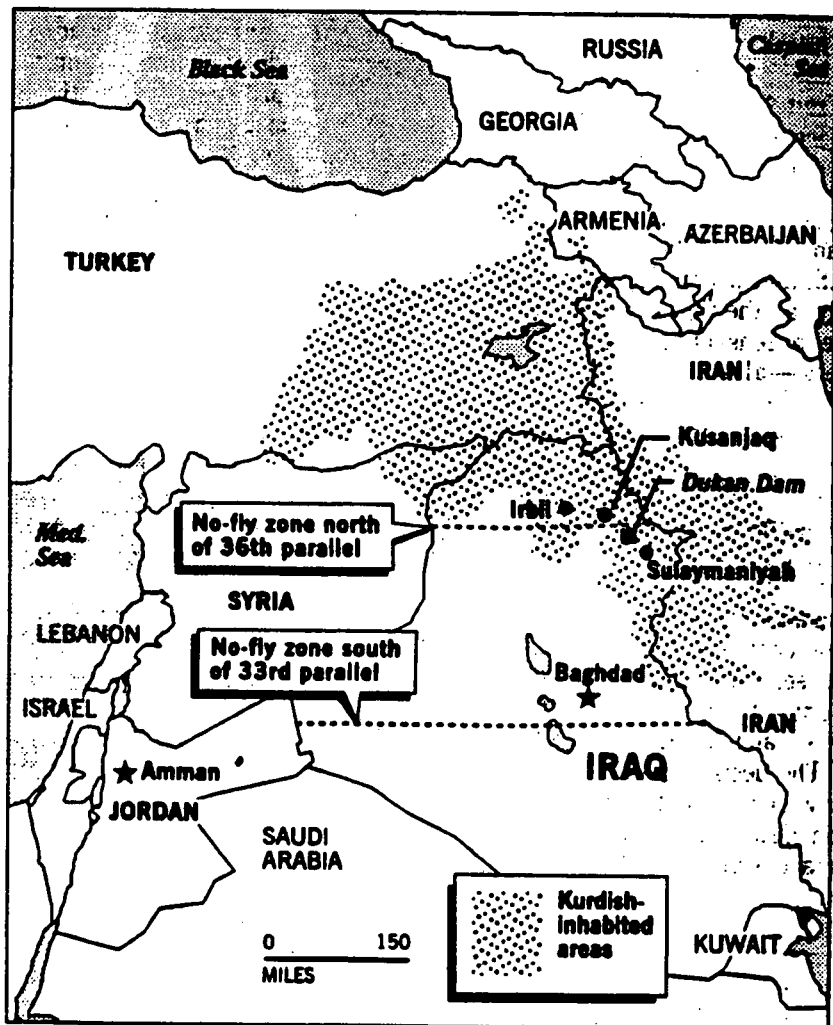


Massoud Barzani

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK): Until Saddam's roundup of its leaders and the KDP's conquest of its headquarters yesterday, the PUK was the second-largest faction in northern Iraq. Headquartered until yesterday at Sulaymaniyah, the PUK broke away from the KDP two decades ago. The PUK recently accepted aid from Iran. Leader: Jalal Talabani.

Iraqi National Congress (INC): After the United States and its allies drove Iraqi forces from northern Iraq in April 1991, the United States sought to ease tensions among the Kurds, resulting in the formation of this U.S.-backed umbrella group of anti-Saddam factions, most notably the KDP and PUK. Fighting resumed in 1994 when the KDP refused to share its oil tax revenues with the PUK.

National Accord: Formed with Saudi help in 1990 and, according to Iraqi opposition sources, this year the recipient of millions of dollars in U.S. assistance. The National Accord is an exile group specializing in anti-Saddam propaganda. Its greatest assets are a radio station and two powerful transmitters in London and Amman, and backing from Jordan's King Hussein. Leader: Ayad Alawi, a Baghdad-educated doctor who was once a leading figure in Iraq's ruling Baathist Party, but who since the late '70s has been a leading critic and advocate of a coup to overthrow Saddam.



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BY LARRY FOGEL—THE WASHINGTON POST